

Jesus in Talmud

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For many religious, there is a great difference between an idea that is said in a book that is not canonized and an idea that is mentioned in a canonized book, especially when it is a criticism or an offense. Canonization is the approval of the authority of a text or the sanctification of a devotee. Thus, in the rivalry among religions, when an offense or criticism is made about another religion, if the source of this offense is a non-canonical text, the effect is not the same if it were made by a canonized work. That is, the mention in a popular and non-canonical text does not produce the same impact of the mention in a canonical text. This is a very common mentality in religious culture.

An example is what happened to hostile accounts of Jesus in the collection of the *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu* (Jesus' Life Book), the Jewish version of the life of Yeshu (Jesus), which was never canonized in Judaism, always remaining as popular texts, never bothered Christians so much. On the other hand, very different was the impact of hostile statements on Jesus (*Yeshu*) in the Talmud, a sacred and canonized text, the second in Jewish authority after the Hebrew Bible.

Although the Talmud reproduced only brief offensive statements about Jesus (*Yeshu, Yeshu ha-Notzri, Ben Stada, Ben Pandera*, etc.), their impact on the Christian clergy was resounding, provoking furious reactions (persecution, reading ban, censorship, and burning), as we shall see below; while *Toledoth Yeshu* extrapolated in the hostilities and humiliations of *Yeshu* (Jesus), with much more extensive and offensive accounts, but

never bothered Christian authorities as much as the Talmud harassed. The difference was in canonical authority.

Therefore, the brief study below seeks to show one of the many versions about the life of Jesus, this time from the perspective of a tradition outside of Christianity, versions that emerged in the first centuries of the Christian era.

The First Records of the Jewish Versions on Jesus (*Yeshu*)

Just as the apocryphal Gospels diverge from the canonical Gospels in the accounts of Jesus' life and sayings, but without harassing him, the anti-Christian narratives of the Jews, in turn, go much further by deprecating and mocking Jesus. These hostile accounts are not medieval creations, as many Christians think. For there are documents confirming that Jewish versions of the life of Jesus, very different from the versions of the canonical and apocryphal gospels, were already circulating orally in the second century, they were only enlarged during the Middle Ages. The oldest record appears in the work *Dialogue with Trifon, the Jew*, of the Christian apologist Justin, the Martyr, probably composed in the year 135 CE. In it, *Trifon*, a fictitious Jew created by Justin, for literary purposes alone, states that "Jesus, an impostor from Galilee, whom we crucified, but his disciples robbed at night from the tomb, where he was lying when released from the cross, and now deceive men by claiming that he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven" (*Dialogue with Trypho, The Jew*, Chapter 108 - Praten, 1867: 235). That the theft of the body

of Jesus was a controversy from the earliest years can be confirmed in the Gospel of Matthew 28: 12-5, when the Jewish priests met with the religious leaders and devised a plan. They "gave the soldiers a large sum of money, saying to them, "You must declare this: his disciples came during the night and stolen the body while they were asleep. (...). Therefore, the soldiers received the money and followed the instructions. And this version spread among the Jews unto this day" (NIV-PT, Mt. 28: 12-5).

Even more hostile is the summary of Jesus' life in *The True Doctrine* (Greek Λόγος Αληθής - *Logos Alethes*) of the Greek thinker Celsus, a lost work of the second century but reproduced largely in the heresiology *Against Celsum* (gr. Κατά Κελσου - *Kata Kelsou*) of the Christian Origen (3rd century CE.), written in an attempt to refute the criticism of the Greek author. Celsus accused Jesus of having invented his birth of a virgin; and warns Jesus that he was born of a Jewish village, a poor country woman, who got her livelihood from the weaving¹, and was expelled from her house by her husband, a carpenter by profession, because she was convicted of adultery, after having been expelled by her husband, she wandered for a while, then she unhappily gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate son, who having labored as a servant in Egypt, by virtue of his poverty, acquired some miraculous powers, of which the Egyptians are very proud, then returned to his own country, highly enthusiastic over them, and through these

¹ In the Huldreich version of *Toledoth Yeshu* she is mentioned as a hairdresser

powers he proclaimed himself a god (Origen *Contra Celsum*, vol.18 and 32 - Chadwick, 1980: 28 and 31; see also: Schonfield, 1937: 132-8 ; Schäfer, 2007: 18-9 and Cook, 2011: 215s). Celsus also revealed his suspicion about the veracity of the Gospel accounts, saying that "although I could say much about what happened to Jesus that is true, and nothing like the accounts that were written by the disciples ..." (Origin *Against Celsum*, vol. II, 13 - Chadwick, 1980: 78 and Schonfield, 1937: 132). He further adds that some "Christian believers, as whom in an outbreak of intoxication have gone so far as to alter the original text of the gospel three, four, or several times, they have altered its content in order to enable them to deny the difficulties before the criticism" (Origen *Contra Celsum*, vol.2.27 - Chadwick, 1980: 90 and Schonfield, 1937: 133).

Celsus was wary of the miraculous phenomena that occurred during John's baptism on Jesus in the canonical Gospels, questioning Jesus directly as follows: "When you were bathing near John, you say you saw what appeared to be a bird flying toward you from the air. What trusted witness has seen this apparition, or heard a voice from heaven regarding you as the son of God? There is no proof except your word, and the evidence you are able to present is from one of your men who was punished like you?" (Origin *Against Celsum*, I. 41 - Chadwick, 1980: 39) Also, Celsus questioned the divinity of Jesus regarding his flight after the condemnation, an episode that does not appear in the canonical gospels, nor in the Apocrypha, but known from the Jewish tradition of that time, as follows: "How can we consider him a God, when on other occasions, the people have perceived, he did

not manifest anything of what he had promised to do, and when we condemned him, we sentenced him and we decided that he should be punished, he was caught hiding and fleeing in the most humiliating manner and actually was betrayed by those he called disciples? (*Origin Against Celsum*, II.09 - Chadwick, 1980: 73 and Schonfield, 1937: 137).

Over time, new hostile episodes were added to this Jewish tradition and transmitted orally, from generation to generation, until some passages were included, through mentions, in the Talmud, perhaps around 300 CE until the year 600 CE, and then in the rabbinical *Midrash* commentary, to finally be compiled in written form, through different versions, during the Middle Ages, in a collection known as *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu*.²

The Talmud

The Talmud (תְּלִמּוּד) is the document of Rabbinical Judaism formation at the end of Antiquity. He is the most authoritative text for Jews after the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*). It is an extensive compilation of the Oral Law (*Torah Shebealpeh*), while the Torah is the Written Law (*Torah Shebikhtav*), in other words, it is the oral interpretation of the Written Law previously preserved only in memory and transmitted orally. There are two versions of the Talmud: the Palestinian Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*),

² To know the *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu* collection, see: Schäfer, 2014; Klausner, 1926: 47-54; Schonfield, 1937; Van Voorst, 2000; Cook, 2011: 215-31.

completed around the fourth century CE, and the Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*), completed around the sixth century CE, the latter is the most extensive and most esteemed. It is constituted of two parts compiled in two stages, the oldest one is the *Mishnah* (tradition), and the later one is the *Gemara* (comment). There are also supplementary comments known to *Tosefta* and *Midrash*, which are generally not included in the Talmudic volumes. The Talmud belongs to the sect of the Pharisees, the only ancient sect of pre-Rabbinic Judaism that survived the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). The reason for the compilation of the laws of the Talmud for the written form may have been the fear of the few surviving rabbis after the great revolt that oral tradition could be lost.

The Talmud is a very extensive work, it has 64 tractates (*masekhot*) divided into 6 orders (*sedarim*). The English translation of Soncino Publishing House of 1935-52 covered 35 volumes, later reprinted in 18 volumes in the year 1961 and the electronic edition has almost 10,000 pages. Talmudic literature has developed in stages. The first stage is known as the Tannaic period, the name attributed by virtue of the *Tannaim* sages of that time, from the first century CE until about 200 CE. The main text of Tannaic literature is *Mishnah*. After the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt in 70 CE, the Pharisees were the only organized group in Judaism to survive. With Roman permission, they created a rabbinic center on the coast of Palestine, with the most influential rabbi of the time, *Yohanan ben Zakkai*, as the leader. They took on the task of beginning to compile the ancient legal traditions of the Pharisees, some from the first centuries BCE.

The body of texts previously preserved in memory was studied and its coding started. Then Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Meir took over the task, and the material was organized into legal categories. Shortly after 200 CE, the process was completed by Rabbi Judah, the Prince, who supervised the compilation of the collection of religious laws in the *Mishnah*, and then the Tannaic period ended.

Because the Jewish law is mutable, the process of interpreting the Torah in new cases continued after the year 200 CE. Then began the amarotic period of Rabbinical Judaism, name derived from the wise rabbis (*amoraim*) of that time. *Mishnah* became a subject of theological and legal development. Finally, two *Guemaras* on the *Mishnah* developed, one in Palestine and one more extensive (and finally much more influential) in Babylon. Then, two collections of the Talmud emerged: The Palestinian Talmud, also known as the Talmud of Jerusalem or *Yerushalmi*, was completed around 350 CE; and a more external one, the Babylonian Talmud, also known by *Talmud Bavli*, completed around the year 500 CE.

Despite the Talmud's great authority and prestige within the Jewish community, especially among the Orthodox, it was not immune to criticism. The well-known Jewish reformer Abraham Geiger declared in the nineteenth century that the Talmud was "an awkward colossus that needed to be overthrown" (De Lange, 2000: 56). In addition, in the definition of some Jewish feminists, the Talmud is "a gigantic monument of discrimination and submission of women". It is not all the Jewish currents that accept it in its entirety, some reinterpret it in the light of the contemporary

mentality, while others reject it completely. The immense sense of misogyny, prejudice, discrimination and submission of women in the Talmud is only comparable to that of the misogynous *Manusmrti* (Code of Manu) of the Hindus. Because of their extension and obsoleteness, the archaic laws of the Talmud challenge the customs of the contemporary age, as well as counter to some UN conventions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Therefore, for the most critical authors, the Talmud is an archaeological piece that should be displayed in a museum, due to its obsolete character.

The Persecution, Censorship and Burning of the Talmud

The intolerance of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages went so far as to admit that mere exposure to ideas and heretical books was enough to jeopardize the eternal salvation of its faithful. With such concern in mind, the Church mobilized to protect its followers by censorship or burning books that were considered dangerous. The censorship ranged from persecution, through the obligation to erase censored passages, by the prohibition of its reading, by confiscation, until the burning in the fire in a public square. In addition, several *Indices* (lists of prohibited books) were issued.

Although the Church had already chased some books and promoted its burning, persecution of the Talmud began in 1236, when a Jewish apostate, Nicholas Donin, sent a memorandum to Pope Gregory IX relating 35 charges against the

Talmud, claiming that it had blasphemies about Jesus and about Christianity. Then, in 1239, Pope Gregory IX ordered an investigation and because of it, sent letters to the priests of France summarizing the charges and ordering the confiscation of Jewish books in March 1240. After the Barcelona debate in 1263, James, the King of Aragon, ordered that the Jews should, within three months, eliminate all passages in their writings that were offensive to Christianity. Disobedience of this order could result in harsh punishments and destruction of the works in question.

The official meddling of the Church in Jewish life came to light with the persecution of the Talmud. Related in 1559 in the *Index Auctorum et Librorum Prohibitorum*, issued by Pope Paul IV, the Talmud was subjected to innumerable debates, attacks and burnings. In March 1589, Pope Sixtus V extended the prohibition in his *Index* to the books of the Jews, containing anything that could be interpreted as being against the Catholic Church. In 1595, the *Index Expurgatorius* of the Jewish books was created. This *Index* listed books that could not be read without the passages being revised and deleted before publication. The official reviewers, who were generally apostate Jews, were appointed to carry out this review in accordance with the rules laid down in *De Correctione Librorum*, which appeared in the *Index* of Clement VIII in 1596. Then, passages of the Talmud were erased, altered and even torn. About 420 Hebrew books were listed in a 1903 manuscript. There are thousands of Jewish books with signs of censor interference, words and entire passages blurred with ink, and even signatures from the censors at the end of the

volumes. A great deal of textual errors in the standard editions of the Hebrew books owe their origin to such activities of the censors. The last edition of the *Papal Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1948 still included Jewish works (for further study, see: Steinsaltz, 1976: 81-5).

Peter Schäfer summarized thus: "The history of the transmission of the *Bavli* text (Babylonian Talmud) is hampered by the fact that many of the earliest manuscripts are lost because of the Catholic Church's aggressive policy against the Talmud, which culminated in many burnings of the Talmud, ordained by the Church (the first in 1242, in Paris). Moreover, after the infamous Jewish-Christian debate in Barcelona in 1263, the Church began (generally relying on the expertise of converted Jews) to censor the text of the Talmud and to eliminate (erase, blur, etc.) all the passages that the experts thought were objectionable or offensive to Christian doctrine. So, the passages that referred to Jesus became the main victim of such activity" (Schäfer, 2007: 132).

The Manuscripts Used by Peter Schäfer

Thanks to the current technology of gathering an enormous amount of data and making it available electronically to researchers, research on the Talmud has been greatly favored. By this new resource, huge online databases of many Talmudic manuscripts can be consulted. Peter Schäfer used in his book *Jesus in Talmud* 14 manuscripts, both censored and uncensored; also two printed versions, Soncino (1484-1519) and Vilna (1880-1886), both with censored and

uncensored excerpts. Obviously, the uncensored passages are those that are important to know what the Talmud says about Jesus. The oldest used by Peter Schäfer was the manuscript Firenze II-I-7-9 of 1177 CE, and the most recent the Herzog manuscript 1, a Yemeni manuscript of 1565 CE. Full list in Schäfer, 2007: 131-2. A manuscript widely used by him in many parts of his study was the manuscript Munich Cod. Hebr. 95 of 1342 CE.

He reproduced a list of the passages where Jesus is mentioned in the Talmud showing the manner in which Jesus is described in the different manuscripts, as well as the passages that were erased, blurred, or altered by the censors (pp. 133-41). For example, the passage from the tractate *Gittin* of the Talmud says: "He went and brought Jesus" (manuscript Munich 95), while the printed version Soncino omits the end of the sentence: "He went and brought ...", and the printed version Vilna changes the end of the sentence as follows: "he went and brought the sinners of Israel". The Vatican manuscript 130 adds: "he went and brought Jesus the Nazarene" (Schäfer, 2007: 141). A curiosity about censorship in the excerpts from the manuscripts analyzed by Peter Schäfer (p. 41-5) is that in some of them the censors appear to have been negligent or careless, since some passages with reference to Jesus were censored, whereas in others do not. More curious yet is when an identical phrase about Jesus is mentioned in two different passages in the same manuscript, and the phrase is only censored in one passage, leaving the other intact.

The Discussion on the Mentions of Jesus in the Talmud

Already in the first reading of the passages of the Talmud that mention Jesus, it is possible to notice the contempt of the rabbis to him and to Christianity. In their view, Jesus was not an important religious figure and Christianity an insignificant sect. Jesus is mentioned in brief passages, often exemplifying an author of a bad deed, or as an example of a pervert. Contempt is so much that it comes to be sometimes referred to as *peloni* (a certain person), or in other passages no name is mentioned in episodes clearly referring to him, even in excerpts from manuscripts that have not been censored.

This contempt, therefore, makes it difficult to identify the mention of Jesus in the most implicit passages, a difficulty that divides the researchers of this subject into those who are minimalists, that is, those who ascribe a small number of passages concerning Jesus, the maximalists, that is, those who ascribe a great number of passages to Jesus and finally the moderates, who are those who ascribe a moderate amount, remaining between the two extremes. Because of the implicit character in the mention of Jesus, a heated discussion on this subject arose among the researchers. Based on this debate, the passages concerning Jesus can be divided into explicit passages, where he is mentioned directly by the names *Yeshu* (Jesus) and *Yeshu ha-Notzri* (Jesus the Nazarene) and the implicit passages, where he is mentioned by such

names as: *ben Stada* (son of *Stada*),³ *ben Pandera* (son of *Pandera*), *Balaam* or *peloni* (a certain person).⁴ The passages censored in the manuscripts add even more difficulty in identifying the mention of Jesus. Therefore, it is not possible to follow in this study only the English translation of the Soncino printed version, since it reproduces the censored excerpts; but rather, for a more comprehensive effect, it will be used here the comparison of different manuscripts by Peter Schäfer in his book (p. 131-41), which makes it possible to identify the sections censored, as well as the knowledge of the original writing in the excerpts of the manuscripts that escaped the fury of Christian censors.⁵

The Family of Jesus (*Yeshu*)

Before mentioning the passages in the Babylonian Talmud that mention the relatives of Jesus (*Yeshu*), we must report the Jewish version of his birth. Very different from the canonical Gospels, the Jewish versions, from the record of the

³ Sometimes corrupted as *ben Stara* in some manuscripts of the Talmud.

⁴ Some authors argue that these names do not refer to Jesus.

⁵ Peter Schäfer's extensive work on the comparison of the different manuscripts is indispensable in the present understanding of the mentions of Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, due to the existence of manuscripts with censored passages and uncensored passages, for in this comprehensive comparison it is possible to perceive the difference with previous works, when the collation was not so complete, for examples, see: Herford, 1903 *passim* and Klausner, 1926: 18-47.

Greek thinker Celsus and passing through some versions of the *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu*⁶ compiled in the Middle Ages, he was not born of a virgin mother but of an adulterous relationship between his mother Miriam (Mary) and the soldier Joseph Pandera, because she was already engaged to a fiancé, so Jesus was a bastard son. Then Peter Schäfer explains why the name "Stada" is also attributed to his mother Miriam (Mary): "Stada is an epithet that derives from the Aramaic / Hebrew root *sat.ah / sete*, (to deviate from the right path, to mislead, to be unfaithful). In other words, his mother Miriam was also called "Stada" because she was a *sotah*, a woman suspected of adultery, or rather, condemned for adultery" (Schäfer, 2007: 17). Whereas his biological father, Jose Pandera, was a soldier who lived near his mother Miriam's house, so he attracted by her beauty, seduced her. She became pregnant and then gave birth to a bastard son, whom she baptized with the name *Yeshu* (Jesus).

This tradition seems to precede the *Toledoth Yeshu* and the Talmud, since it is reported in Celsus's work, where "the mother of Jesus is described as expelled from house by the carpenter with whom she was committed, since she was condemned for adultery and had a son with a certain soldier named *Panthera (Pandera)*" (*Origen Contra Celsum*, I.32 - Chadwick, 1980: 31; see also: Schäfer, 2007: 19).

⁶ A collection of different versions of the life of *Yeshu* (Jesus) from the point of view of the Jews. Because of its derogatory character, the component texts of this collection are known as anti-gospels or hostile gospels.

The rabbi's contempt for Jesus was so much in the early years of Christianity that in the Tractate *Shabbat* 104b of the Babylonian Talmud, they became embroiled in the following doubts and confusions: "Was he the son of *Stada* and not the son of *Pandera*? Rabbi *Hisdah* said: her husband was *Stada* and the lover *Pandera*. But was not *Pappos ben Yehuda* and her mother *Stada* the husband? His mother was Miriam, the woman who let her hair grow. This is what they say about her in Pumbeditha:⁷ She was expelled from home for being unfaithful to her husband" (Schäfer, 2007: 16; see also: Herford, 1903: 35 and Van Voorst, 2000: 109).⁸

Jesus as a Fool

Before quoting the next mention of Jesus in the Talmud, it is necessary to inform the context from which it was withdrawn. Unlike the canonical gospels, whose miracles of Jesus are of divine origin, the Jewish tradition records two versions of the origin of the magical powers of Jesus. The version recorded in some texts of the *Toledoth Yeshu* informs that Jesus, in order to gain power,

⁷ Name of an ancient city of Babylon where an influential rabbinic academy worked.

⁸ This passage is repeated in the tractate *Sanhedrin* 67a and appears only in manuscripts that were not censored. The English translation of the printed version Soncino reproduces, through a note, the uncensored writing of other manuscripts. Peter Schäfer used the manuscript Munich 95 in the translation of this passage and compared it with the writing in other manuscripts through notes (pp. 148-50).

stole the knowledge of the Ineffable Name of God in the temple of Jerusalem, through the cheating of writing the name on a small piece of parchment and hiding it in a cut made in his leg, so as not to be surprised by the lions guarding the exit of the sanctuary and made those who memorized the name, forget it with the roar of the lions. Another version, recorded by the Greek thinker Celsus, states that Jesus learned his magic in Egypt, when he worked in that region as a servant. "She (Mary) wandered about for a while, so she miserably gave birth to Jesus, a son illegitimate, who having labored as a servant in Egypt, by virtue of his poverty, acquired some miraculous powers, of which the Egyptians are very proud, returned to his own country, highly enthused because of them, and through these powers proclaimed himself a god" (*Against Celsum*, vol. I. 28 and 32 - Chadwick, 1980: 28 and 31; see also: Schonfield, 1937: 132-8; Cook, 2011: 215s).

This last version is the one that is mentioned in the same tractate *Shabbat* 104b, during a discussion about the permission or the prohibition of writing during *Sabbath* day. Jesus (*Yeshu*) is mentioned as an example of who disrespected this prohibition. "But, *ben Satra* (*Stada*) did not learn only in such a way"? That is, did not he use tattoos on his body as an aid to facilitate learning (of the Ineffable Name), so were not they (the tattoos) clearly letters and therefore forbidden to be written during the *Sabbath*? Further on, Jesus is offended in the following manner: "But, *ben Stada* (Jesus) did not bring sorcery from Egypt by means of a tattoo (*biseritah*) on his skin"? Hence three rabbis disregarded this objection with the

counterargument that *ben Stada* (Jesus) was a fool, and that they (rabbis) would not let a fool's behavior influence the implementation of the Sabbath laws" (Schäfer 2007: 16, see also: Herford, 1903: 35; Klausner, 1926: 21 and Van Voorst, 2000: 109).

Jesus as an Inconvenient Disciple

Another mention of Jesus (*Yeshu*) in the Babylonian Talmud appears in the tractate *Sanhedrin* 103a, in a passage commenting on a verse from Psalms (91.10): "... no plague shall approach his tent; that you do not have a son who publicly spoils his food, such as Jesus the Nazarene (*Yeshu ha-Notzri*)" (Schäfer, 2007: 26; see also: Herford, 1903: 56-7 and Van Voorst, 2000: 113).

Peter Schäfer explains that the phrase "spoil his food" refers to an idiomatic phrase of the time that meant "committing an inconvenient action" (idem: 27). Therefore, Jesus is here quoted as an example of someone who has done an inconvenient deed.

Jesus Antagonized by His Own Master

In an absolutely unknown episode to canonical and apocryphal texts, narrated in the tractate *Sanhedrin* 107b of the Babylonian Talmud, Jesus (*Yeshu*) is pushed by his own master, *Yehoshua b. Perahya*: "... nor as *Yehoshua b. Perahya*, who pushed Jesus of Nazareth with both hands" (idem: 34).

In another episode in the tractate *Sotah* 47a, even more stranger to the canonical and apocryphal texts, Jesus is excommunicated by his

master (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) when they were both in an inn and his master was attracted by the beauty of the innkeeper: "He (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) got up, went out, and was in a certain inn. They (the guests and the staff) paid him great respect. He said, "How beautiful is this innkeeper!" He (Jesus) said: "Master, her eyes are watery." He (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) replied: "You wicked disciple, do you deal with such a thought? He then issued 400 blows of a *shofar*⁹ and excommunicated him (Jesus). He (Jesus) stood before the master several times and he said, "Receive me", but he (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) refused to pay attention to him. One day, while the master was reciting the *Shemah*,¹⁰ he (Jesus) came to him (the master). This time he (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) wished to receive him and made a sign for him (Jesus) with the hand. However, he (Jesus) thought that he (the master) wanted to dismiss him again. He (Jesus) left set up a brick and worshiped it.¹¹ He (*Yehoshua b. Perahya*) said to him (Jesus), "repent", but Jesus answered him: "Thus I have learned from you: whoever sins or causes others to sin is deprived of the power to do penance". The master said, "Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic, deceived and led the

⁹ A kind of trombone used in Jewish ceremonies.

¹⁰ A Jewish prayer.

¹¹ However, much this may lead us to think that it is a mockery of the Rabbis on the Christian practice of worshiping idols, P. Schäfer notes that this is not a matter of this, but an ancient Babylonian custom of worshiping bricks, where the Babylonian Talmud was compiled, therefore a late interpolation of the publisher, since the event did not occur in Babylon (Schäfer, 2007: 37 and 156-7).

people of Israel to error" (Schäfer, 2007: 35; see also: Van Voorst, 2000: 111-2).

As we can see above, it is clear the rabbis' intention to deprecate the role of Jesus as a disciple, as well as to ridicule the competence of *Yehoshua b. Perahya* as a master.

The Execution of Jesus

Very different from the canonical version, whose death of Jesus took place on the cross, the version of the Babylonian Talmud reports that he was initially hanged and then a herald left announcing, 40 days before, his execution by stoning. Therefore, instead of being crucified, Jesus was first hanged and then stoned to death. The account appears in the tractate *Sanhedrin* 43a: "On the eve of the *Sabbath*, on the eve of the Passover, Jesus the Nazarene was hanged (*cloth'uhu*). In addition, a herald went out 40 days before announcing: 'Jesus the Nazarene will be stoned because he practiced sorcery (*kishshef*), instigated (*hissit*) and seduced (*hiddiah*) Israel to idolatry. Whoever knows of anything in his defense let him come and declare it. 'But, since they did not find anything in their defense, they hung him on the eve of the *Sabbath*, the eve of the Passover. *Ulla* said: 'Do you suppose that Jesus the Nazarene was someone for whom a defense should be made'? He was a *mesit* (one who instigated Israel to idolatry), concerning whom the Merciful God says: 'Show no compassion for him and do not protect him' (Deuteronomy, 13.09). As to Jesus the Nazarene was different because he was close to the

government" (Schäfer, 2007: 64-5; see also: Herford, 1903: 83). Again, the mention of Jesus (*Yeshu*) occurs in the midst of a discussion this time about the procedure of executing a condemned man as an example of how the execution rite should be performed. P. Schäfer explained that the final phrase "As to Jesus the Nazarene was different, for he was close to the government", it means that the Jews took the most careful precautions, for Jesus had friends at the top of the government, perhaps a reference to the interest of the wife of *Pontius Pilate* for information from the people that Jesus performed miracles.

This Talmudic episode makes clear the reaction of the rabbis to the Christians' claim that Jesus was accused by false witnesses and had no time to defend himself, so the introduction of the herald character with his announcement of the execution 40 days in advance (Van Voorst, 2000: 114, 117-8 and 120).

The Disciples of Jesus

Very different from the canonical Gospels that enumerate twelve major disciples of Jesus (Mt, 10: 1-4, Mc, 03: 13-9 and Lk, 06: 12-6), the Babylonian Talmud, in the tractate *Sanhedrin* 43a-b, lists only five disciples. The passage says, "Our rabbis taught, Jesus the Nazarene had five disciples, they were: *Mattai*, *Maqqai*, *Netzer*, *Buni* and *Todah*" (Schäfer, 2007: 75). Note that except for the name *Mattai*, which resembles the name Matthew, the rest have no resemblance to the names of the apostles mentioned in the Gospels. In addition, this passage informs that the five disciples

died together with Jesus. Perhaps an attempt to disprove the canonical version that they witnessed the resurrection of Jesus after death and thereby cast doubt on the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Jesus in Hell instead of Heaven

In a bizarre passage, Jesus is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, in the tractate *Gittin* 56b and 57a, as one of the three greatest villains in Jewish history,¹² along with *Titus*, the destroyer of the Second Temple, and *Balaam*, the prophet of the nations. All three are in hell, where they are serving punishment for their misdeeds. The basis of history and the passage is in the *Mishnah*, which lists those terrible sinners who have no more chance in the afterlife. The interlocutor is *Onqelos*, a character who was about to convert to Judaism. After interviewing *Titus* and *Balaam*, "he (*Onqelos*) went and brought Jesus the Nazarene (*Yeshu ha-notzri*) from his grave through necromancy and asked him: Who is important in that world (in hell)? He (Jesus) answered: Israel.

Onqelos: So, how about joining it?

Jesus: Seek their welfare, seek not their evil. Whoever touches them, it is as if touched the pupil of God.

Onqelos: What is your punishment?

¹² The references to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud are so confusing at times that it is common to find contradictions. For example, while in many passages Jesus is treated with contempt, for being considered an insignificant character, in the passage above he is included in the list of the three principal enemies of Israel.

Jesus: With boiling excrement.

For the master said: Whoever mocks the words of the master is punished with excrement boiling. Come and see the difference between the sinners of Israel and the prophets of the kind nations" (Schäfer, 2007: 85; see also: Herford, 1903: 68).

The conversation is very strange; Jesus is already dead, suffering punishment in hell and is brought from his grave, through magic, in order to answer some questions. The intent to ridicule Jesus is clear; he is punished with boiling excrement. Moreover, the pretense of denying the occurrence of the resurrection is implicit, for, instead of rising and rising to heaven, he is in hell, fulfilling punishment. Explanations of this passage by P. Schäfer are also confused (p.85s).

Final Considerations

As in the collection of the *Sefer Toledoth Yeshu*, the mentions of Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud also have little historical value, since they are concerned more with the nature of the affront and the polemic against the founder of a hated sect, than with objective reports of credibility, therefore these reports are not historical documents. To say so does not mean that all credibility history must then be attributed to the canonical texts or, much less, to the apocrypha texts. These are also not historical documents, but rather the vehicles of an incipient catechetical program designed to exalt Jesus by composing narratives that combined facts and fictions along with the goal of persuading and harnessing followers in the early years of the

Christian sect growth. Therefore, they are more for catechetical texts than for documentary texts.

The historical value that these hostile mentions leave us is to know the degree of sectarian rivalry that involves the relationship among religions. That is, what a religion is capable of inventing in order to depreciate the founder of a rival religion. In contrast, Christians did much worse with Jews during the Middle Ages.

In the face of so much animosity and rivalry in times of emergence and initial growth of religions, historians are unable to know what is fact, or what is exaltation, or what is manipulation or what is refutation, or what is reworked at the time of writing or compiling the texts of each sect. At the present stage of historical studies about Jesus, what can be safely said is that of all narratives, the canonical texts bear the greatest number of signs closest to historicity, only this, compared to the apocryphal texts, Talmudic and *Toledoth Yeshu* narratives, yet, far from being an historical account. The stricter historical studies conclude that the New Testament, strictly speaking, reproduces an intricate combination of history and myth, just like the rest of the Bible. Therefore, the great task of biblical historians has for many years been to identify what is fact and what is myth in the biblical narrative.

In conclusion, to decrypt anti-Christian mentions as provided of historicity does not mean automatically accredit canonical texts with historical validity, since all sides had reasons to deform the history at the time of composition.

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